

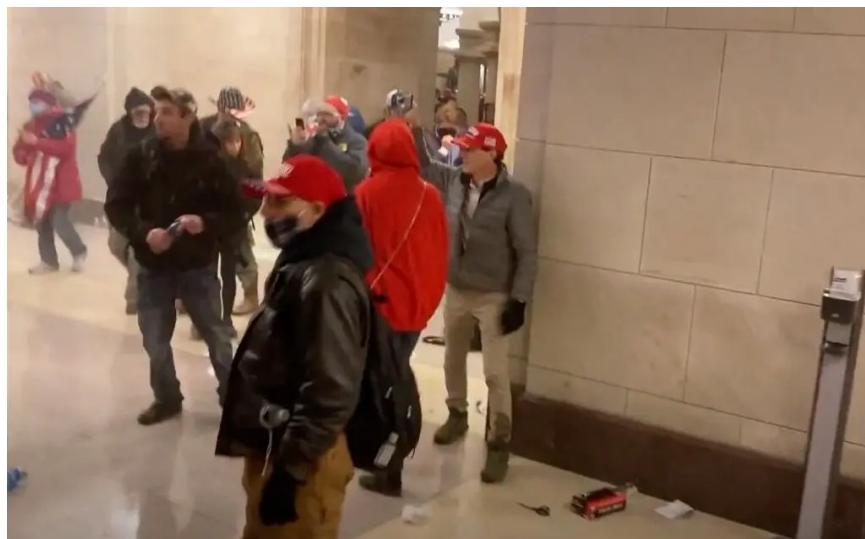
# The New York Times

[Ukraine War](#) > [LIVE Updates](#) [Ukraine's War Dead](#) [Maps: Russia's Invasion](#) [Photos](#) [Documenting A](#)

## An American's Murky Path From Russian Propagandist to Jan. 6

Charles Bausman, a former financial executive who runs websites that promote far-right views, recorded footage in the Capitol for a Russian television producer. Soon after, he fled to Moscow as a “political refugee.”

Give this article



Charles Bausman, right, in a red cap and a gray jacket, during the Jan. 6 insurrection. via YouTube



By [Mike McIntire](#)

July 3, 2022, 5:00 a.m. ET

In security footage from Jan. 6, it is easy to overlook the thin man wearing a red Trump hat who filters into the U.S. Capitol Building to record the mayhem with his phone.

Within 24 hours, the man, Charles Bausman, gave his recordings and commentary to a Russian television producer for a propaganda video. He then decamped to Moscow, where, appearing on a far-right television network owned by a sanctioned oligarch, he recently accused American media of covering up for neo-Nazis in Ukraine.

“We must understand that in the West,” Mr. Bausman told Russian viewers, “we are already in a situation of total lies.”

For Mr. Bausman — an American alumnus of Phillips Exeter Academy and Wesleyan University who speaks fluent Russian — it was the latest chapter in a strange odyssey. Once a financial executive who voted for President Barack Obama, he emerged in 2014 as a public critic of the left and of the United States, boosted by Russian state-sponsored organizations through speaking invitations, TV appearances and awards.

Central to his transformation was a series of websites he created pushing anti-America, pro-Russia themes, as well as racist and homophobic messaging. Some of his posts have racked up millions of views, and his 5,000-word screed on “the Jewish problem” has been hailed by antisemites around the world and translated into multiple languages.

Mr. Bausman’s path in some ways tracks a broader shift on the political right that embraces misinformation and sympathy toward Russia while tolerating an increasingly emboldened white nationalism. For its part, the Kremlin has sought to court conservatives in the United States and sow discord through a network of expats, collaborators and spies.

People who have written for Mr. Bausman’s websites or promoted his work have come under scrutiny by American intelligence, and the founder of a pro-Russia forum that hosted him and others was charged in March with being an unregistered agent of Moscow.

Mr. Bausman initially gained some prominence as a Russia apologist, but he has lowered his profile in recent years as he has espoused more extreme views. Yet he has been Zelig-like in exploiting cultural and political flash points, racing from cause to cause.

After surfacing as a voluble defender of Russia’s 2014 invasion of Crimea, Mr. Bausman became an outspoken Trump supporter.

; neo-

neo-Nazis at the party. The junior Republican protests against

coronavirus restrictions and the 2020 election and most recently has reappeared in Russian media to criticize the West's response to the war in Ukraine.



Mr. Bausman attended a 2015 conference hosted by RT, a news channel tied to the Kremlin. Mikhail Voskresenskiy/Sputnik, via AP

Konstantin Malofeev, an influential oligarch indicted by the United States over alleged sanctions violations, said he had asked Mr. Bausman to appear on his television network because Mr. Bausman was one of the few Russian-speaking Americans willing to do it.

"Who else is there to invite?" Mr. Malofeev asked.

Mr. Bausman, 58, did not respond to multiple requests for comment. No charges have been brought against him related to the events of Jan. 6, though he appears [inside the Capitol](#) in video clips introduced in court cases against others. When a Russian TV host referred to him as "[a participant](#)" in storming the Capitol, Mr. Bausman interrupted to say that the description could get him into trouble, and that he was a journalist.

#### Better Understand the Russia-Ukraine War

- **History and Background:** Here's what to know about [Russia and Ukraine's relationship](#) and [the causes of the conflict](#).
- **How the Battle Is Unfolding:** Russian and Ukrainian forces are using a [bevy of weapons](#) as a deadly war of attrition [grinds on in eastern Ukraine](#).

- **Outside Pressures:** Governments, [sports organizations](#) and businesses are taking steps to punish Russia. Here [are some of the sanctions adopted so far](#) and [a list of companies that have pulled out of the country](#).
- **Stay Updated:** To receive the latest updates on the war in your inbox, [sign up here](#). The Times has also [launched a Telegram channel](#) to make its journalism more accessible around the world.

But, on other occasions, he has described himself differently. Speaking on a white nationalist podcast in April, in which he attacked critics of Russia as “evil pedophile globalists” who control the “enslaved West,” he explained why he was back in Moscow:

“I’m a political refugee here.”

## Connecticut to Moscow

President Vladimir V. Putin had just invaded Crimea in 2014 when Mr. Bausman said he [had an idea](#). He would create an alternative news source to counter what he called Western media’s “inaccurate, incomplete and unrealistically negative picture of Russia.”

The website, [Russia Insider](#), was directed at an English-speaking audience and offered stories like, “Putin to Obama: You’re Turning the U.S.A. Into a Godless Sewer,” and “Anti-Christian Pogrom Underway in Ukraine.” Content was often aggregated from other pro-Russia sources, including RT, the Kremlin-funded television network.

The role of online agitator was not an obvious one for Mr. Bausman, who grew up in the wealthy suburb of Greenwich, Conn., attended prep school and went on to earn a history degree from Wesleyan and study business at Columbia. His experience with Russia dates to his childhood, when his father served as the Moscow bureau chief for The Associated Press.



Mr. Bausman with his father, who worked in Moscow for The Associated Press.

As a college graduate in the late 1980s, he returned to Russia, and, with help from his father's connections, worked briefly for NBC News. But when the Soviet Union collapsed, Mr. Bausman found a new role: as a multilingual fixer for entrepreneurs scrambling to cash in on the emerging economy.

A. Craig Copetas, a former Wall Street Journal correspondent who [wrote a book](#) about the post-Soviet business era, said Mr. Bausman worked with Russians who "were the forerunners of the oligarchs."

"Charlie speaks excellent Russian," he said, "so he was a valuable asset — he was like the young American prince of Moscow."

Mr. Bausman's early success was not to last. There are gaps in his résumé, and U.S. court records show that he filed for bankruptcy in 1999.

A former business associate recalled Mr. Bausman's father beseeching people to "help my son" with his career. This person — one of several who did not want to be identified because of Mr. Bausman's ties to extremists — described him as "just this lost guy" who seemed to struggle professionally despite impressive qualifications. He worked a succession of Russian private equity jobs, never staying in any position longer than a few years.

Mr. Bausman's last role was with the agribusiness investor AVG Capital Partners. A 2012 company presentation, which listed him as director of investor relations, boasted of "strong partnerships" with Russian authorities and included a photo of Mr. Putin.

The exact timing of Mr. Bausman's switch to propagandist is murky, but two profiles on the Russian social media platform VK offer a clue. The first, from 2011, is a sparse page featuring a wan

ennis.

In the second profile, from two years later, he looks tan and confident in an open-collared shirt. The VK groups he joined were strikingly radical, including a militant Russian Orthodox sect and another called the Internet Militia, whose goal echoed what would soon become Mr. Bausman's focus: "to protect and defend our native information field" against American attack.

#### Live Updates: Russia-Ukraine War ›

Updated 43 minutes ago

- Ukraine strikes a base in the Russian-controlled city of Melitopol, an official says.
- Three killed and dozens of residential structures damaged after explosions in Russian city.
- Russia's use of older missiles suggests its stock of precision weapons are low, analysts say.

## Oligarch Connections

Publicly, Mr. Bausman turned to crowd funding to pay for Russia Insider. Behind the scenes, however, he was in contact with Mr. Malofeev, a promoter of Orthodox nationalist propaganda.

Leaked emails [made public](#) in 2014 revealed Mr. Bausman corresponding with a Malofeev associate, saying "we published your Serbia info" and asking for money. In an email to Mr. Malofeev, the associate praised Mr. Bausman's site as "pro-Russian" and noted that he "wants to cooperate."

Mr. Malofeev was backing another media project at the time with a similar agenda: Tsargrad TV, which he created with a former [Fox News employee](#), John Hanick. Both Mr. Hanick and Mr. Malofeev were charged by the United States this year with violating sanctions imposed in 2014.



Mr. Bausman has appeared on the television network of Konstantin Malofeev, a Russian oligarch indicted by the U.S. for alleged sanctions violations. Tatyana Makeyeva/Reuters

In an interview, Mr. Malofeev said he believed Mr. Bausman “has done a great job and that he is a very brave person,” but he denied they had “a financial relationship.”

Mr. Bausman has always said he did not receive support from Russian authorities. But there is little doubt that his emergence as an American salesman of pro-Kremlin views was aided greatly by entities controlled by or tied to the Russian state.

After Russia Insider went live, Mr. Bausman began appearing on RT and other Russian media, and a news crew from a major state-owned TV channel traveled to his parents’ home in Connecticut to film him discussing his new website. On Facebook, he boasted that “our traffic exploded after this aired.”

He was invited to join [panel discussions](#) at another state-owned outlet, [received an award](#) in 2016 named after a pro-Russia journalist killed in Ukraine, and spoke at a Kremlin-sponsored [youth conference](#) in newly captured Crimea. He [gave interviews](#) to Russian Orthodox figures, speaking approvingly of Mr. Malofeev.

In April 2016, Mr. Bausman’s work [was promoted](#) by a Russian website, RIA FAN, that has been linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin, an oligarch indicted by the special counsel Robert S. Mueller. The website initially [shared an address](#) with the Internet Research Agency, the Russian government “troll factory” accused of using [fake social media accounts and online propaganda to disrupt the](#)

Russia analysts who have followed Mr. Bausman's work say it has the hallmarks of a disinformation project. Olga Lautman, a senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis who researches Russian propaganda campaigns, said his messaging merged seamlessly with that of Mr. Putin's government.

"The initial purpose of his outlet was to muddle the truth in American circles about Crimea," she said. "And then you see his outlet and others repurposed to support the Kremlin narrative about Syria, and then the 2016 U.S. elections."

"It appears," she said, "to be a classic Russian influence operation."

## Hard-Right Turn

With Donald J. Trump's 2016 presidential victory, Mr. Bausman's media outlet began to promote more extreme views. In a celebratory post after the election, he struck a militant chord that shocked old friends.

"Trump's election is perhaps akin to Luther nailing his theses to the door, but now the demons are wakened, and they know they must fight or be killed, and as in the 16th century, they will not go quietly," he wrote. "And there will be blood. Let us hope that it is the figurative, digital kind, and not the real, red, hot, sticky stuff."

A turning point came in January 2018, when Mr. Bausman posted a lengthy polemic, "It's Time to Drop the Jew Taboo," that was both an antisemitic manifesto and a call to action for the alt-right.

"The evidence suggests that much of human enterprise dominated and shaped by Jews is a bottomless pit of trouble with a peculiar penchant for mendacity and cynicism, hostility to Christianity and Christian values, and in geopolitics, a clear bloodlust," he wrote.

It was welcomed by white nationalist figures like Richard Spencer, who called it "a major event."

Outside the far right, Mr. Bausman's embrace of antisemitism was widely condemned. The U.S. State Department flagged it in a report on human-rights concerns in Russia, and the diatribe prompted a disavowal from RT.

After the death in August 2018 of his mother, who left an estate valued at about \$2.6 million, Mr. Bausman bought two properties in Lancaster Pa where his family had roots

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frequently helped him out, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which has compiled [several reports](#) on his activities. Ms. Bausman-Watkins died in May.

“They funded his whole life,” she told the center, “and then he inherited their money when they died, and they’re still funding his life.”

## The Insurrection

While living in Lancaster with his Russian wife and two young daughters, Mr. Bausman turned his attention to two new websites devoted largely to white nationalist content. Headlines included: “Out of Control Black Violence” and “Jewish Intellectuals Call on Gays to Perform Sex Acts in Front of Children.”

Mr. Bausman concealed his ownership of one of these sites, National Justice, through a private registration, which The New York Times confirmed by reviewing data [leaked last year](#) from Epik, a web-hosting service favored by the far right. The site has the same name as a white nationalist organization and featured posts by one of its leaders, though it is not the group’s official site, according to its chairman, Michael Peinovich.

In an interview, Mr. Peinovich said Mr. Bausman had hosted party members at his farmstead for an inaugural meeting in 2020 (a large event [first reported](#) by a local news outlet, LancasterOnline). But afterward, he said, his group “went our own way” because it did not agree with Mr. Bausman’s preoccupation with supporting Mr. Trump.

Three days before Jan. 6, 2021, Mr. Bausman allowed Rod of Iron Ministries, a gun-themed religious sect led by a son of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, to meet at his property, according to photos on social media. Members of the sect had been active in “Stop the Steal” rallies, some of which Mr. Bausman had [also attended](#), and were at the Capitol on Jan. 6.

On Facebook, Mr. Bausman posted an appeal for people to go to Washington “to support Trump.” At various points during the riot, Mr. Bausman can be seen inside the Capitol, often [using his phone](#) to record the chaos.



; has said he entered the Capitol in the capacity of a journalist. via YouTube

Afterward, he returned to Lancaster and gave a [lengthy interview](#) for a video about the insurrection produced by Arkady Mamontov, a Russian television host known for splashy pro-Kremlin propaganda pieces. The video also included footage of Mr. Bausman outside his home that appears to have been filmed months earlier. Mr. Mamontov did not respond to a request for comment.

In the video, Mr. Bausman suggested, without evidence, that federal agents had instigated the violence at the Capitol to “discredit Trump,” and he painted a dystopian, conspiratorial picture of American society. It is a theme that he has carried forward to more recent appearances on Mr. Malofeev’s television network, in which he has accused Western media of lying about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

It is not clear when Mr. Bausman left the U.S., but he was in Moscow for a TV appearance on the day of President Biden’s inauguration, two weeks after the insurrection at the Capitol. In the white nationalist podcast interview he gave in April from Russia, he said he had not been back home since.

When asked by the host if he was still a Trump fan, Mr. Bausman said he was not, before adding with a laugh that there was one thing that could restore his loyalty.

# Our Coverage of the Russia-Ukraine War

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## On the Diplomatic Front

- Faced with a newly aggressive Russia, NATO leaders [outlined a new vision](#) that names Moscow as [the military alliance's primary adversary](#). It also declares China to be a strategic "challenge." Just before publishing this mission statement, the alliance [extended formal membership invitations to Finland and Sweden](#), paving the way for NATO's most significant enlargement in more than a decade.
  - In meetings of the Group of 7 nations and NATO this week in Europe, President Joseph R. Biden and his allies [hammered home the idea that they must stand united against Russia](#). But they [failed to describe the endgame in the long war of attrition](#).
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## On the Ground

- [Russian missiles struck a residential tower and a recreational center](#) in a coastal town southwest of the Black Sea port of Odesa, killing several people and injuring dozens, Ukrainian officials said.
  - Russian troops [withdrew from Snake Island in the Black Sea](#), after repeated assaults by Ukrainian forces. The withdrawal is expected to undermine Russia's control of vital grain shipping lanes.
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## Ukrainians and the War

- After surviving the siege of Mariupol earlier this year, [thirteen members of the Mariupol Drama Theater have reconvened in western Ukraine](#) to work on a play about a Ukrainian dissident who died in a Russian prison camp in the 1980s.
  - Vitaliy Kim, the head of the regional military administration in the embattled southern city of Mykolaiv, has become the face of Ukraine's resistance. For him, an unwavering belief in victory [is essential to survival](#).
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## Russians and the War

- Early in the war, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia appeared tense, angry and even disoriented. But in June, a new Putin emerged: relaxed, patient and self-confident. [What is behind the shift?](#)
  - As the trial of the W.N.B.A. star Brittney Griner on drug charges [gets underway in Moscow](#), there are hints that the Kremlin might be interested in a deal with the Biden administration that would link Ms. Griner's fate [to that of the Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout](#), who is serving a prison sentence in the United States.
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## How We Verify Our Reporting

- The Times has deployed dozens of journalists on the ground in Ukraine, as a way to cut through the fog of misinformation. [A security team watches out for them](#).
- Our team of visual journalists analyzes satellite images, [photographs](#), videos and [radio transmissions](#) to independently confirm troop movements and other details.

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